

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Axminster

Lyme Road, Axminster, Devon EX13 5BE

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 December 2024

Outcome

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Axminster has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Robert Meech. This school is part of Plymouth CAST multi-academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Zoe Batten, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ruth O'Donovan.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has high expectations of pupils to achieve well. They enjoy learning a well-structured curriculum. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their ideas with each other, which helps them to extend their thinking. For example, pupils were observed discussing with insight their 'useful inventions' based on a book they had read.

Pupils, including children in the Reception Year, learn the routines of school well. The learning environment is calm and orderly, which helps pupils to learn well. Through the curriculum, pupils learn to be kind, respectful and welcoming towards others. Pupils develop compassion for those less fortunate by fundraising for charities and providing food at Harvest time. Pupils also act as 'buddies' for children in the Reception Year and support them with their reading.

The personal development of pupils at the school is strong. Pupils learn about the importance of liberty and democracy. The personal, social and health education curriculum is effective in supporting pupils to learn about the world. They are supported in developing their social skills through group conversations at lunchtime. Pupils relish the opportunities to play outside with mud kitchens and other resources. Children in the Reception Year learn to play well together. They share, take turns and forge strong friendships.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has created a well-designed curriculum that enables pupils to build incrementally on their prior knowledge as they move through the school. The school has identified what pupils need to know at each stage of the curriculum so they are supported to learn well. However, in some subjects in the wider curriculum, staff do not routinely use information about what pupils know and do not know with precision. Consequently, staff do not adapt the ways they teach some subjects to ensure that all pupils have secure knowledge before moving on to more complex concepts.

Reading is prioritised at the school. Pupils learn to read well through a well-taught phonics programme. Pupils and children in the Reception Year learn to make clear links between sounds and the letters they represent. Pupils who struggle with reading receive bespoke support that enables them to learn well. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported very effectively to read. Pupils love reading. In English, pupils use the language and style of the authors they read to support their writing development. Reading permeates the school. For example, pupils regularly read to the school in assembly.

The school identifies the needs of pupils with SEND effectively. Consequently, staff are knowledgeable about how to provide individualised support for pupils with SEND. In particular, pupils receive very strong support for their speech and language development. The school works closely with external agencies to ensure pupils receive the most appropriate support. This enables pupils with SEND to communicate their thinking and learn effectively.

Pupils, including children in the Reception Year, learn a breadth of subjects. For example, they were observed eagerly learning about rhythm in music. In mathematics, pupils are enthused by building up their knowledge of multiplication and applying it to mathematical problems.

The school manages pupils' behaviour very well. Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. This enables pupils to share any concerns they may have about school or the world beyond school. Pupils and staff describe the school as a 'special place'.

Pupils' attendance at school is strong. However, the school is aspirational and is focused on ensuring every pupil attends regularly. Consequently, the school is tenacious in providing bespoke support to pupils, parents and carers to enable pupils to come to school.

The pastoral development of pupils is a strength of the school. Pupils' learning is enhanced through trips and visitors to the school. For example, pupils visit London to learn about its history. Pupils routinely visit Axminster Library to develop reading habits beyond school.

Parents who responded to the online survey were overwhelmingly positive about the

social, emotional and academic provision at the school. One parent's view echoes that of others, 'St Mary's is a lovely school with wonderful teachers.' Staff are unanimous in their pride at working for the school. They are similarly positive about the support for their workload and well-being. They share the ambitions of the school for all pupils to achieve well. Governance is effective. They pose challenge and support in equal measure.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not ensured that staff check with precision what pupils know and do not know in some subjects in the wider curriculum. Consequently, some pupils do not receive the support they need to learn effectively. The school must ensure staff use assessment information to inform adaptations to the teaching of some subjects in the wider curriculum so pupils learn well.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in July 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to

find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

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| Unique reference number | 140772 |
| Local authority | Devon |
| Inspection number | 10344676 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 132 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Ruth O'Donovan |
| CEO of the trust | Zoe Batten |
| Headteacher | Robert Meech |
| Website | www.stmarysaxminster.devon.sch.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 2 and 3 July 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school is part of Plymouth CAST multi-academy trust.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the executive headteacher, the head of school and members of the leadership team and governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors held discussions with the director of education and a school improvement officer from Plymouth CAST multi-academy trust.

- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with staff to consider their views.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors considered the views of parents and carers who responded to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also evaluated the views of staff from the Ofsted online survey.

Inspection team

Susan Aykin, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Hannon

Ofsted Inspector

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